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ABA report suggests changes in ways legal services are provided to indigent.

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The American Bar Association Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services released its Report on the Public Hearing on Access to Justice, which suggests that the legal profession change the way it provides personal civil legal services to potential clients by broadening the types of services available, particularly to low- to moderate-income people.

The report has not been approved by the ABA's policy-making House of Delegates. The report stems from the committee's public hearing to explore barriers to justice for those of low and moderate income, held at the ABA 2002 annual meeting. Participants included individuals from public interest organizations, court organizations, law schools, legal aid groups and state, local and specialty bar associations.

Many of those testifying stressed the importance of recognizing a continuum of legal needs, and that technology such as the Internet and the availability of online legal services are tools that help consumers achieve broader access to lawyers and to justice.

"This hearing underlines the necessity of exploring new ways to provide legal services to consumers," said Mary K. Ryan, chair of the Delivery Committee. "We are reminded that we in the legal profession need innovative routes to connect people of moderate income to the legal help they need, as well as improved ways of matching lawyers with underserved and unserved clients."

In addition to expanded technology, the report cites "unbundled" legal services as an important tool in connecting people of moderate income with the legal help they may need. Unbundling occurs when lawyers provide only part of the legal services for a matter, such as counseling, drafting paperwork or making limited court appearances, while the client does the rest.

The committee also heard testimony that rules of ethics and court procedures limit the ability and willingness of lawyers to provide unbundled services, and that these rules should be examined more closely and in some cases modified.

The Report on the Public Hearing on Access to Justice is part of the Delivery Committee's broader efforts to expand the public's access to lawyers, legal services and the courts by examining policies that impact on that access. For more information about the report or the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services, visit the committee's website at www.abalegalservices.org/delivery.